

Sermon August 22nd, 2021

The Spirit is Our Helper

Over the past three weeks we have reflected on Jesus' invitation to us in his "I am the bread of life" sermon. Jesus' invitation to us to depend on Jesus and his teachings for our survival and well-being. Jesus' invitation to us to believe in his gift of eternal life. Jesus' invitation to us to see that Jesus is abiding in us. Even in the midst of our suffering.

After hearing this sermon, many who follow Jesus express their displeasure over the heaviness of this invitation. They are struggling to understand why Jesus is asking so much of them. How can we depend on you in all circumstances? How can we trust you when we are still living under these oppressive conditions? How can we believe in this gift of eternal life when we can't see it? We can't touch it? Why can't you take away our suffering instead of challenging us to believe you are still there even when we suffer? How can we do what you do? All the healing, the miracles, the people you hang out with? It's just all too much Jesus? Isn't there a 30-day free trial to this membership **(Image)**?

Unfortunately, Jesus' sermon is so challenging for some people to hear that they end up walking away.

Sometimes what Jesus asks of us can feel like a lot. For example, Jesus asks you to serve on a team or on the board in the church. At first you feel excited by the opportunity to contribute in some way to the work of the church. But, after a while, you start to feel the heaviness of the work. You start to see the challenges that come with working in the church. Like, not everyone is going to be receptive to your ideas. Sometimes there will be strong disagreements that can lead to conflict. Sometimes you have to give up something like a leisure activity or time with loved ones to make time to go to meetings or to participate in a ministry **(Image)**. Sometimes the goals you set within these ministry teams start to feel like they are impossible to achieve. Especially when you face set back after set back. Sometimes what you envision when accepting this invitation doesn't even come close to what the finished product looks like.

No one who has come forward to serve on the board or on the teams could have predicted what Jesus has asked of them during this pandemic. Talk about feeling the heaviness of this invitation to be Christ's disciples.

Or, after lots of prayer and discernment, Jesus asks you to reach out to someone, and try to make amends. It has been years since you talked with them. The discomfort in your stomach is reflecting your heightened anxiety as you prepare yourself to contact

them. You think of a million reasons why you shouldn't even bother. But you contact them, because you believe this is what Jesus is asking you to do.

Or, Jesus asks you to forgive a person who has been abusive to you. Just to be clear, Jesus isn't asking you to re-enter an abusive relationship. Jesus sees how your anger towards this person is impacting you, and your ability to follow him. So, Jesus asks you to forgive them, wish them well, and then let go. Moving on with your life. So, you will no longer be a prisoner to your anger.

Or, Jesus asks you to walk up to this person in the park, and offer them support **(Image)**. You don't know this person, and their appearance makes you a little nervous. But you can see by their body language that they need help. And that Jesus is nudging you to go to this person.

Jesus asks a lot of us. Sometimes it can feel like too much. Sometimes we may find ourselves looking towards the door **(Image)**.

I compare our relationship to Jesus with our relationship with our spouse, or our parent, or our child or our friend. We need to invest a lot of time and energy if we want these relationships to do well. And sometimes it can feel like too much, and we end up finding ourselves looking towards the door.

For example, you keep getting in heated arguments with your spouse over an issue, and you don't know how to find a compromise on dealing with this issue. Over time you get exhausted and find yourselves drifting apart.

Or, your parent doesn't understand you. They want you to be a certain way, but you just don't fit into this mold they are creating for you. This feeling of being misunderstood puts a lot of tension on your relationship.

Or, your child is making choices that are hurting them and their loved ones. You try to get through to them, but they keep making the same mistakes over and over again. Putting a strain on your relationship with them.

Or, your best friend gets married and becomes a parent while you are still single. You want things the way they used to be, but your friend has changed, and you no longer know how to relate to them.

Like our relationship with Jesus, our relationship with one another can feel heavy at times. It takes a lot of time and energy to nurture our relationship with Jesus and with one another. It takes a lot of time and energy to not walk out that door.

In our gospel this morning, when the people express their displeasure, Jesus responds to them. Jesus reassures them that the Spirit dwells within them. And it is the Spirit that will help them take on this heavy burden. It is the Spirit that will turn their hearts

towards Jesus when they are in need. It is the Spirit that will open their minds to believe in eternal life. It is the Spirit that will give them the strength and hope to endure through their suffering.

Like the disciples, Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit to help us live out our discipleship. Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit to turn our hearts to depend on Jesus when we have needs that are left unmet. Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit when we have doubts about Jesus' promise of eternal life. Giving us hope. Helping us understand. Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit when we are rattled by all the suffering. Showing us where Jesus is at work in our lives in the midst of our suffering.

The Spirit is with us. If we serve on a team or board the Spirit is their equipping us with what we need. Whether it is time or talents or whatever we need to do what Jesus invites us to do. I looked at everything our teams and board were able to accomplish this past year, and if I ever doubted the presence of the Spirit in the life of the church, I don't anymore.

The Spirit is there with us when we need to reconnect with someone or when we need to forgive someone and let go. The Spirit is there with us when we need to help someone find support.

How many times have you went to help someone not knowing what to say, and then were in awe at the words coming out of your mouth at the time?

How many times have you found yourself forgiving that person, and being surprised at how free you feel afterwards?

The Spirit is there with us as we take up our crosses and follow Jesus **(Image)**.

Yes, it isn't easy to say and do everything Jesus asks us to say and do. But if we believe in the presence of the Spirit, we start to see that we are always doing these things with the Spirit's help. And this belief takes a lot of pressure off us.

As does the grace that God offers us. Though Jesus asks a lot of us, when we do fall short, Jesus doesn't discard us. Jesus lifts us up, and gives us another opportunity to be proclaimers of God's healing and redeeming love.

Yes, it isn't easy to say and do everything we need to say and do to keep our other relationships together. To keep our other relationships healthy.

The Spirit dwells in us when we are in relationship with Christ. But the Spirit also dwells in us when we are in relationship with one another. The Spirit helps us see that we are not alone when we are dealing with contentious issues in our marriage. The Spirit is there working in and through us to help us be patient and gracious as we try to come to

a solution. The Spirit opens our eyes to see our child as who they were created to be. The Spirit opens our ears to listen to the wisdom of our loved ones when we find ourselves on a destructive path. The Spirit helps us recreate our friendship in new ways when we go through life changes. When we lean on the Spirit and God's grace, we see that every relationship we are in has an opportunity to thrive. We see that we are not alone, and that God is working in and through us to impact all our relationships with the love of God.

Let us pray, thank you Jesus for giving us the Spirit that dwells within us. Help us trust in this Spirit when we face the heaviness that comes with following you. Help us trust in this Spirit when we face the heaviness that comes with being in relationship with one another. **Amen.**

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